

The Significance of the Mycenaean Pottery found East of the Jordan River

Although it might be slightly unorthodox to present one's conclusions first, let me say at the beginning that I believe that the presence of Mycenaean pottery¹ at sites located to the east of the Jordan is significant for four major reasons:

- 1) It can demonstrate that the Mycenaean imports were not restricted to the major commercial centers of the coast but that they and/or their contents were also valued in the hinterland;
- 2) It can show, by comparing the Transjordan sample with the full Aegean repertoire, which kinds of products were in most demand in the inland area(s);
- 3) It can suggest the local land routes by which these (and other) goods travelled from the coastal emporia to the inland markets; and
- 4) It can give an impression of the relative wealth and stature of the inhabitants of Late Bronze Age Transjordan, people who were able to acquire commodities that had travelled, by both sea and land, from production centers over 1,000 km distant.

Site distribution

Imported Mycenaean pottery is known from over a hundred sites in the eastern Mediterranean between the Orontes River and the Gaza Strip.² These imports are more numerous at the large coastal sites such as Ras Shamra/Ugarit, Byblos, and

¹ The term 'Mycenaean' as used here is *not* intended to refer to pottery specifically from the site of Mycenae, but rather to describe the ceramic output of the Greek mainland and insular workshops during the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 BC). The term 'Late Helladic' would, perhaps, be more suitable for the material exported to the Levant.

² The topic of the Mycenaean relations with Syria-Palestine was the subject of the author's (unpublished) PhD dissertation, *The Nature and Extent of the Mycenaean Presence in the Southeastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age*, University of Chicago (1976). This work is in the process of being completely rewritten and updated for publication. A separate catalogue of the Mycenaean pottery exported to this area presently exists on a (Data Base 3+) computer program (MYCINDEX). Anyone wishing for more information about the project should write directly to the author: c/o Department of Classics, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 (USA).

For earlier works dealing with imports to this area, cf. F. Stubbings *Mycenaean Pottery from the Levant*, Cambridge University Press, 1951; V. Hankey, 'Mycenaean Pottery in the Middle East: Notes on the Finds since 1951,' *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 70 (1967) and H.-G. Buchholz, 'Ägäische Funde und Kultureinflüsse in den Randgebieten des Mittelmeers: Forschungsbericht über Ausgrabungen und Neufunde, 1960–1970,' *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1974: 3. Beiblatt zum Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts 89 (1975) 325–462.

Tell Abu Hawam, but they were also traded quite extensively throughout the hinterland. The particular focus of the present paper is on the eight sites east of the Jordan River at which this pottery has been found.³ These sites are situated in several different ecological zones (from north to south): in the northern Highlands: Tell Irbid; in the eastern *ghor* of the Jordan Valley: Tabaqat Fahel (Pella), Tell es-Saidiyeh, Tell Deir 'Alla; in the southern highlands: Amman (airport site), with Sahab

³ This site bibliography is not intended to be a comprehensive collection of references for each site. It is limited to those works that include reference to the imported, Mycenaean pottery. The sites are listed alphabetically.

Amman. V. Hankey, 'A Late Bronze Age Temple at Amman,' *Levant, Journal of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem*, 7 (1974) 131–178.

Deir 'Alla. V. Hankey, *BSA* 70 (supra note 2); and H. J. Franken, 'The Excavations at Deir 'Alla in Jordan,' *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960) 386–393 and 'Excavations at Deir Alla: Season 1964 (Preliminary Report),' *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964) 417–422.

Madeba. G. L. Harding, 'Four Tomb Groups from Jordan,' *Palestine Exploration Fund Annual* 6 (1953) 22–47.

Sahab. R. W. Dajani, 'A Late Bronze—Iron Age Tomb excavated at Sahab, 1968,' *The Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 15 (1970) 29–34; and M. Ibrahim, 'Third Season of Excavation at Sahab, 1975,' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 20 (1975) 69–82.

Tabaqat Fahel/Pella. A. McNicoll and J. B. Hennessy, 'Preliminary Report on the 1979 Season of the Sydney-Wooster Joint Expedition to Pella: 1. The Winter Session (Sydney),' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 24 (1980) 14–33.

The cache of almost 50 Mycenaean vessels mentioned here on page 39 (note 70 referencing V. Hankey, *BSA* 70 (supra note 2)) has been relocated in the Jerash Museum and when study is complete it should add greatly to our knowledge of the market for Aegean imports in Transjordan.

Tell Irbid. R. W. Dajani, 'Iron Age Tombs from Irbid,' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 8–9 (1964) 99–101.

A single Mycenaean sherd (closed form, Stirrup Jug?) was picked up, in the presence of the author, by Dr James Sauer (then director of the American Center of Oriental Research) on the slopes of Tell Irbid in 1975. The present location of this sherd is unknown, but it may form part of the ACOR study collection.

Tell es-Saidiyeh. E. F. Campbell, 'Archaeological Notes and News,' *The Biblical Archaeologist* 28: 4 (1965) 125–128; J. B. Pritchard, 'Two Tombs and a Tunnel in the Jordan Valley: Discoveries at the Biblical Zarethan,' *Expedition* 6: 4 (1964) 2–9; 'A Cosmopolitan Culture of the Late Bronze Age,' *Expedition* 7: 4 (1965) 26–33; and *The Cemetery at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh, Jordan*, University Museum Monograph 41, University Museum (Philadelphia) 1980.

Umm ad-Dananiir. P. McGovern, 'Exploration in the Umm ad-Dananiir Region of the N.W. Beq'ah Valley, 1977–1978,' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 24 (1980) 55–67; and R. B. Koehl, 'Mycenaean and Cypriot Pottery' (Chapter 6) in *The Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Transjordan: The Beq'ah Valley Project, 1977–1981*, by P. McGovern (forthcoming).

to the southeast and Madeba to the southwest; and Umm ed-Dananir in the Beq'ah Valley northeast of Amman (FIG. 1).

This is a rather wide and varied distribution and it is almost certain that other LB sites in the Jordan Valley, such as Kataret es-Samra⁴ will produce Aegean imports with sufficient excavation, and the same goes for sites such as Tell Umeiri on the outskirts of Amman, and Tell el-Husn in the central highlands between Amman and Irbid.

When we look at the total picture, then, we see that Transjordan, in fact, accounts for about 12 per cent of the total number of Syro-Palestinian sites that have produced Aegean imports.

The imported pottery and its function

The pioneer study of Mycenaean pottery was published in 1940 by A. Furumark⁵ who divided the then known corpus of Mycenaean pottery into 103 forms (abbreviated FF, Furumark Forms) which could be further subdivided into 336 separate shapes (abbreviated FS, Furumark Shapes). Of the total number of shapes at least 70 are known to have been exported to the markets of the Syro-Palestinian coast,⁶ about 24 of these (or almost one-third) having been identified at Transjordanian sites. They are:⁷

Form 7, Pithoid Jar

FS 16(?)	Amman
FS 24(?)	Amman
FS 45	Amman
FS 47	Amman
FS 48	Amman

Form 8, Amphoroid Krater

FS 53–55	Amman, Sahab.
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Form 16, Squat Jar with Curved Profile ('Alabastron')

FS 85	Amman
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Form 19, Squat Jar with Angular Profile ('Pyxis')

FS 94	Amman, Tell es-Saidiyeh.
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Form 46, False-necked (Stirrup) Jar

FS 166–67	Amman
FS 171	Amman, Deir 'Alla, Umm ed-Dananir
FS 173	Amman, Tell es-Saidiyeh(?)
FS 178	Amman, Umm ed-Dananir
FS 179	Amman, Deir 'Alla, Tell es-Saidiyeh, Umm ed-Dananir
FS 178/180	Deir 'Alla
FS 178–80(?)	Sahab
FS 183	Amman, Sahab
FS 182–3(SS)	Amman
Misc SJ, (SS)	Madeba
Misc SJ	Amman, Madeba, Tell es-Saidiyeh

Form 47, Lentoid Flask

FS 186	Amman
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Form 48, Globular Flask, Vertical Type

FS 189	Amman
FS 190–92	Deir 'Alla

Form 58, Semiglobular Cup

FS 211–14	Amman
FS 219	Amman
FS 220	Amman

Form 80, Deep Rounded Bowl with Horizontal Handles

FS 283	Amman
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Form/shape Undistinguishable

UD-open	Amman
UD-op/closed	Tabaqat Fahel, Irbid.

The small percentage of 'open' to 'closed' forms is striking in the Transjordanian assemblage of Aegean imports. Only the structure (temple ?) excavated at Amman airport has so far produced open forms, and here we have only fragments of three cups (FS 211–214, 219, 220) and of one deep bowl (FS 283). This is enough, however, to suggest a special character for the Amman context and to add support for the identification of the building as a temple. It is surprising, however, that the 'temple' at Deir 'Alla has produced only Aegean vessels of closed form.

The greatest share of the Aegean corpus from Transjordanian sites consists of closed forms which, for the sake of discussion, can be treated in three groups (FIG. 2): the narrow-necked false-necked jar or stirrup jug (Form 46, with its FS subdivisions), the equally narrow-necked flasks (Forms 47 and 48) and a series of vessels that vary in body profile but share a relatively wide neck and outplayed rim (Pithoid Jar: Form 7/FS 16, 24, 45, 47 and 48; Alabastron: Form 16/FS 85; and Pyxis: Form 19/FS 94). I have suggested elsewhere⁸ that the difference noted in the Greek Linear B texts between the products of the unguent-boilers' labors at Pylos (*po-ro-ko-*

⁴ A very small fragment that *might* be of Aegean fabric was found by the author on the slopes of Kataret es-Samra during the 1985 season. For publications on the site which has already produced imported Late Bronze Age Cypriot (Base Ring II and White Slip II) vessels, cf. A. Leonard, Jr., 'Kataret es-Samra: A Late Bronze Age Cemetery in Transjordan?' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 234 (1979) 53–65; and 'The Proto-Urban/Early Bronze I Utilization of the Kataret es-Samra Plateau,' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 251 (1983) 37–60.

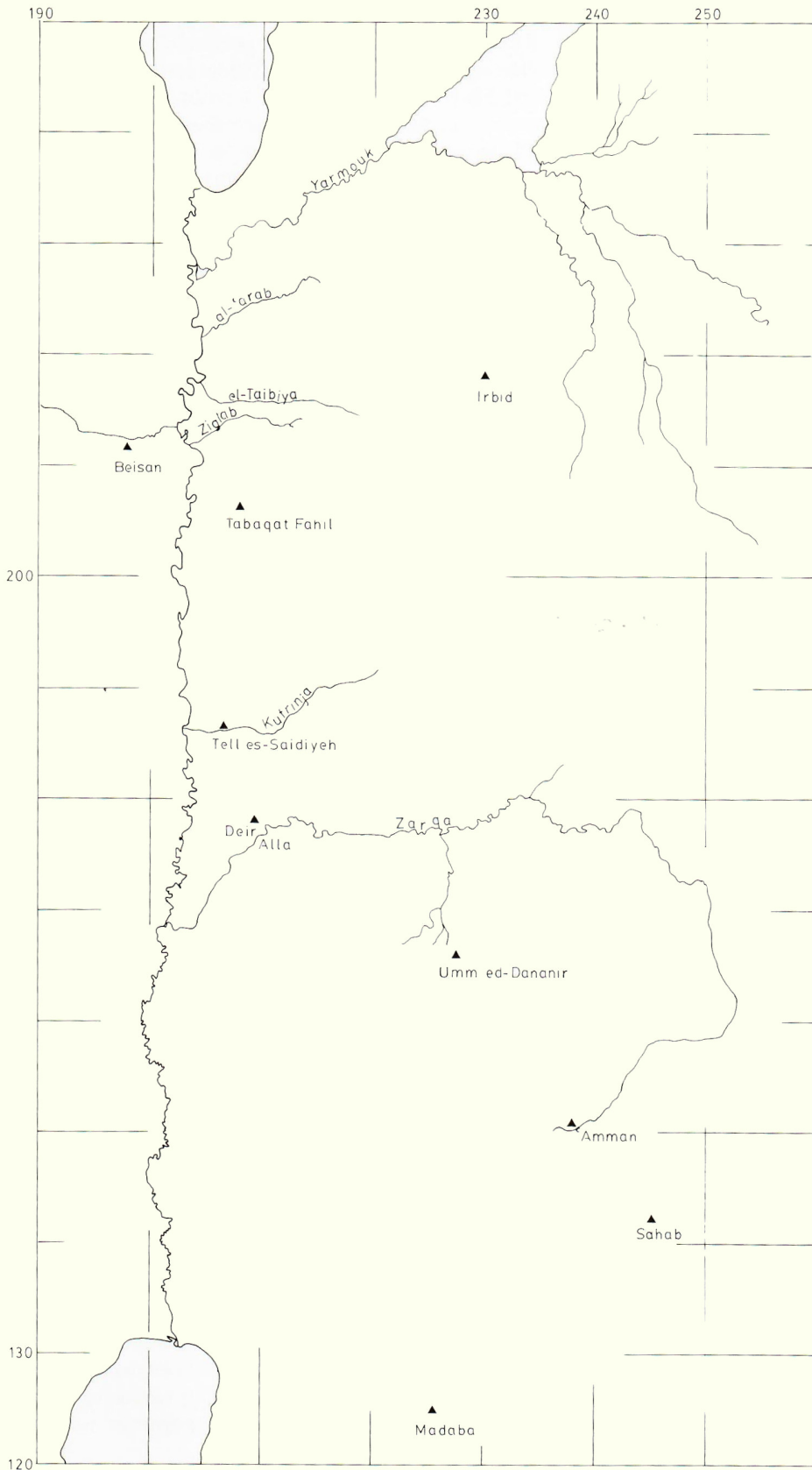
⁵ A. Furumark, *The Mycenaean Pottery: Analysis and Classification*, Stockholm (Svenska Institutet i Athens) 1941; *Chronology of Mycenaean Pottery*, Stockholm (Svenska Institutet i Athens) 1941; and, now, P. A. Mountjoy, *Mycenaean Decorated Pottery: A Guide to Identification*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 73 (Göteborg) 1986.

⁶ This information is available on the MYCINDEX cited in note 2. A forthcoming article by the author and Dr J. Balensi, École Biblique in Jerusalem, will present this updated information in a series of charts.

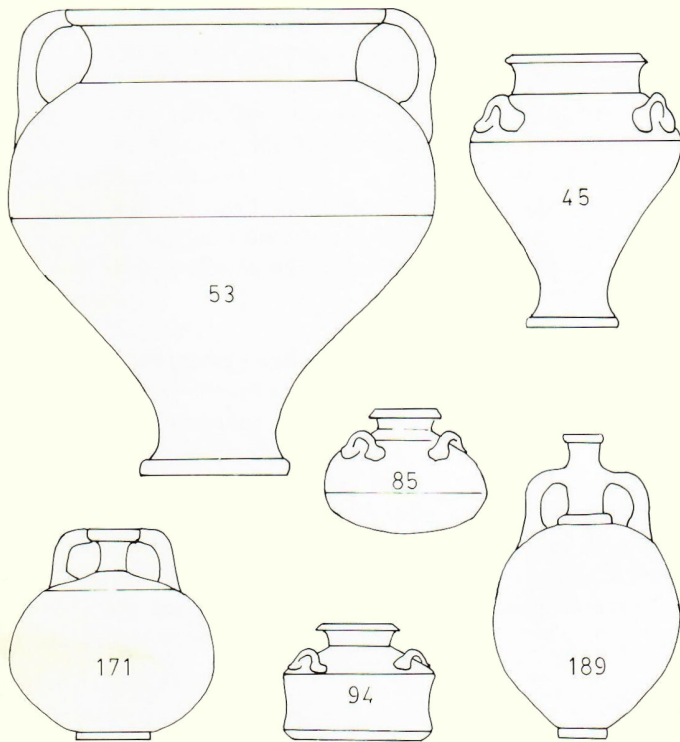
⁷ Only the presence or absence of a particular shape is noted at each site in this list. It does not attempt to give the number of individual vessels of that shape from the site. Uncertain identification of a shape is marked by '?' and the same is used for uncertain occurrences at a particular site. The abbreviation 'SS' refers to the Mycenaean 'Simple Style,' cf. A. Furumark, *CMP* (*supra* note 5) 116–117. Cf. also *MP* (*supra* note 5) 431–446 ('Levanto–Mycenaean and Koine Style').

⁸ A. Leonard, Jr., 'Considerations of Morphological Variation in the Mycenaean Pottery from the Southeastern Mediterranean,' *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 241 (1981) 87–101.

1. Map of Transjordan showing the findspots of Mycenaean pottery.



2. The major 'closed' forms in the Transjordanian *corpus* of Mycenaean imports.



wa/προχρή: 'outpouring,' a pourable liquid; and *we-a-re-pe*/*ἄλοιφή*: 'for smearing on,' an unguent) reflects the difference in the size of the apertures of vessels that are otherwise morphologically quite similar, and that this is exactly the difference between the stirrup jug and the pithoid jar/alabastron/pyxis group. If this assumption is correct, it would indicate that the majority of the Transjordanian trade in Aegean merchandise primarily reflects a trade in imported specialty oils and unguents (olive oil flavored with rose and/or sage?)⁹ and not in tableware, which rarely appears east of the Jordan and, to date, only at Amman. This popularity of closed as opposed to open forms in Syro-Palestinian archaeological contexts is standard throughout the area but nowhere does the distinction stand out as sharply as in the corpus from Transjordan. In fact, from the numerical superiority of the narrow-aperture stirrup jug over the wide-mouth pithoid jar/alabastron/pyxis, it would appear that the thinner oils were preferred to the more viscous unguents.

Identification of trade routes

The sites that concern the present discussion are aligned either along the eastern *ghor* of the Jordan Valley or along the spine of the eastern highlands. In both cases these markets were separated from the coastal emporia by days of travel by the Late Bronze Age caravaneers, even if shipping was direct. It

would have taken even longer if the goods had to be transhipped, since weeks, or possibly months or years, might be required for each link in the commercial chain to find a customer, fix a price and then move the product slowly eastward.

But what were the routes by which these early traders moved their goods? Is there anything in the distribution of the Mycenaean pottery in the eastern Mediterranean that might give some indication? Can a study of the local topography combined with the use of the Aegean imports as 'trace elements' suggest the path travelled by the goods from a country which was situated so far to the west that it was possibly known—if known at all—only by its costly and desirable oils and unguents?

Our first step should be the identification (or suggestion) of a coastal site that would have served as the 'receiver' port for the Aegean goods. Then we must attempt to determine the most logical route by which an early trader might have moved his goods to the east. For the present exercise we would also suggest that the route should, whenever possible, pass by, or near, sites that have themselves produced Aegean imports, I would offer the following model (FIG. 3).

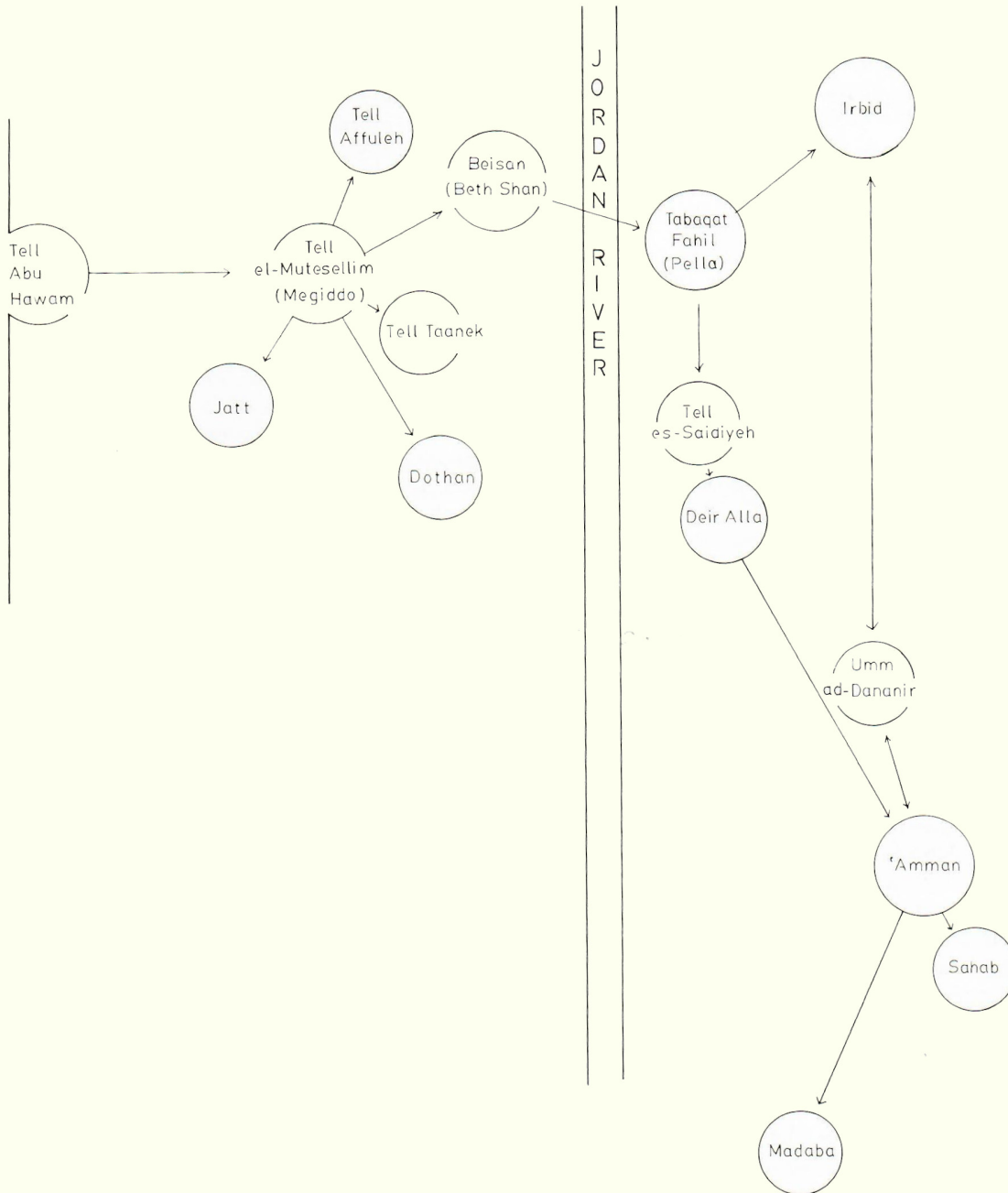
The goods would leave the ship at Tell Abu Hawam, the port that has produced more imported Mycenaean pottery than any other site in the Levant. From here the material would be moved uplands to Megiddo (Tell el-Mutesellim) in the Esdraelon Plain. Megiddo seems to have acted as a distribution center possibly filling the commercial demands of Jatt, Dothan, Tell Taanek, Tell Affuleh and the administrative center at Beisan (Beth Shan). From Beisan (Beth Shan) goods would have been moved easily across the western *ghor* to Tabaqat Fahl (Pella) in the eastern *ghor*. As an east bank distribution center, Pella is geographically well situated to send merchandise northeast to Irbid via the Wadi Ziqlab (and/or the Wadi Taiyiba), as well as southward to the string of sites along the eastern *ghor*, in particular Tell es-Saidiyeh and Deir 'Alla. The imported goods could have reached Amman by travelling up the Wadi Zarqa (accessible just to the south of Deir 'Alla) or down from Irbid through the hill country. If the latter route was used, Umm ad-Dananir could have been supplied as the traders passed through the Beq'ah Valley. Markets in Madaba and Sahab would almost certainly have been supplied through Amman.

The social status of the consumers

But what do we know about the consumers of these products living so far from both the point(s) of production in the Aegean World and the point(s) of primary distribution along the Syro-Palestinian coast? Traditional scholarship, based on Glueck's surveys, suggests that during the Late Bronze Age much of Transjordan was unsettled. However, such a view, giving the impression of Transjordan as a cultural and commercial 'backwater' during the 14th and 13th centuries BC, simply does not agree with analysis of the archaeological evidence. Where we have sites with Late Bronze occupation we have, for the most part, evidence for a sophisticated populace with the

⁹ A. Leonard, Jr., *BASOR* 1981 (*supra* note 8) 99.

3. A model of the trade route(s) by which the Mycenaean pottery arrived in, and was distributed throughout, Transjordan.



knowledge of, propensity for and economic ability to obtain some of the choicest products that circulated among the entrepôts of the eastern Mediterranean.

If, in discussing the Mycenaean pottery from Transjordanian sites this paper has emphasized the contents over the container, an injustice has been done to one particular vessel-type: the Form 8/FS 53–55 Amphoroid Krater (FIG. 2). This is a spectacular object, decorated in a pictorial style that usually, although not always, depicts human figures engaged

in some activity centering around horse-drawn chariots. Such kraters have been found in multiple examples at the Amman Airport site¹⁰ and in a single example from Sahab.¹¹ Although the exact function and significance of these kraters is unknown, their large size (30–50 cm) and the almost canonical decoration with chariot scenes, combine to indicate that these were

¹⁰ V. Hankey, *Levant* 1974 (*supra* note 3) 147–149, FIGS 3, 4.

¹¹ M. Ibrahim, *ADAJ* 1975 (*supra* note 3) Plate 34: 3.

truly specialty pieces. One question comes to mind. Would an individual own such a vessel who did not understand the iconography? A person who was well acquainted with the chariot would exert a considerable amount of social and economic leverage within the community, and this would set the owner apart and place him or her on a par with residents of some of the most cosmopolitan cities of the Syro-Palestinian coast.¹²

Summary

What then have we learned from our look at the Mycenaean ceramic imports that travelled as far east as the communities of Transjordan?

We have demonstrated that the area was not a cultural backwater as traditional scholarship has often suggested, but rather

¹² FS 53–55 kraters decorated with chariot scenes have been found at least at the following Syro-Palestinian sites: Ras Shamra/Ugarit and its port of Minet el Beida, Tell el-Qadi (Tell Dan), Ain Shems (Beth Shemesh), Tell es-Shari'a (Tell Sera'), Tell Ajjul and Tell Abu Hawam cf. A. Akerstrom, 'Mycenaean Problems,' *Opuscula Atheniensa* 12: 2 (1978) 19–86, especially 29–31 and note 27. To these can be added, from the MYCIN-DEX (*supra* note 2): Tell Atchana/Alalakh, Tell Kazel, Ashdod, Tell Gezer, Tell ed-Duweir (Lachish) and most probably Byblos. For newly published fragments of chariot kraters from Atchana/Alalakh, cf. J. H. Crouwel and C. E. Morris, 'Mycenaean Pictorial Pottery from Tell Atchana (Alalakh),' *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 80 (1985) 85–98.

that a number of Transjordanian sites were an integral part of a vast network of commercial enterprise that included trade from as far away as the Aegean world. As to the specific proof of this commerce that has survived (or that is survivable) in the archaeological record, we have noted a preponderance of containers as opposed to tableware forms in the Mycenaean corpus from Transjordan. Furthermore, we have seen that the morphological design of these vessels makes them well suited to the transportation of the kinds of specialty oils and unguents that we know were concocted in Mycenaean workshops on the mainland of Greece and that we know were greatly appreciated by the cultures of the eastern Mediterranean. In fact, when we consider the almost insatiable appetite demonstrated by the Egyptians for similar products from Anatolia, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine, it is even more remarkable that there were individuals or groups living east of the Jordan River that had the economic wherewithal to divert these commodities from the certainty of the long-established Egyptian markets.

Surely then, when we now think of Transjordan in the Late Bronze Age, we must view it in its proper perspective: a land of flourishing communities able actively to engage in the international commerce that characterized the central and eastern Mediterranean during the 14th and 13th centuries BC.